595 less influence than a monogamist or bigamist who is intelligent
556 and fearless. And in the present circumstances one meets monogamists who, because of either their economic situation or their social or political position, enjoy a much greater authority [371] than many polygamists. Intellectual and moral superiority on their part is beginning to make its value felt.

2) Fame and vanity. Because of the very nature of the marriage system, which is intimately bound to -- not to say based on -- financial transactions, the number of wives determines the extent of a man's wealth. And here as everywhere wealth has a fascination; it is considered a mark of superiority. Vanity seizes upon it. And since the possession of wives is the most obvious expression of wealth, the Nkundó see it as a superior means by which to acquire great renown and an illustrious name.

3) A concern over keeping the capital in the family. Personal wealth consists almost entirely of metals (especially copper) and domestic animals. Thus this is the capital involved in the financial transactions accompanying marriage, and in that way it is invested with interest (children, work, influence).

595 Like all pagan people the Nkundó are essentially covetous
556 and egoistic. They do not like to give but want everything for
157 themselves. Except for persons to whom he is bound by natural ties or sincere affection, a Nkundó does not help others except through interdependence or in the hope of reciprocity in some form or other. Thus when he possesses an excess of wealth, even if it is considerable and entirely superfluous, he does not yield it. [473] The idea would never occur to him to give a few copper rings to an indigent bachelor, for example, if he is not forced to do so because of interdependence in the family. Thus, if there are more girls than boys, the excess bride price will be used by him to augment the number of his own wives. For in order that his daughter not be deprived of her nkita, the bride price received must be used again as a bride price. Note that this reasoning has but a limited validity. It is a fact that the ancient custom [372] was for the father to take all his daughters' bride prices for himself, as we have seen in Chapter IV. He did not become polygamous because of excess [bride price]; he was polygamous before his sons married.

595 842 5) The desire to increase the number of children is one of the reasons most frequently given; it is the chief, and sometimes the only, one cited by ethnographers. There is no question that it has a great deal of validity, for the Nkundó like to have many children. It is one of the things on which they pride themselves as well as a powerful means for reinforcing a social position (and we are thus led back to the first reason cited).

The question of knowing whether polygamy actually does favor the birth rate is irrelevant here, even if the results of a comparison were clearly against this system and were it proved that "the more wives a polygamist has, the fewer children he has." For the Nkundó never make this statistical computation. He sees only the principle: several women give more children than one. And for them, that is the gist of the matter. Furthermore, the interest of the people as a whole does not appear on the [157] horizon of the Nkundó's thoughts and feelings: they think only of themselves, and in their egoism, they consider only their own interests.

595 831 6) To all these reasons given by the Nkundó to justify the practice of polygamy, we must add a sixth, which they never mention, sensuality. Without colonization it would have been difficult for us to make this statement. [374] But the new state of affairs shows several flaws in our people's arguments. We have already pointed out some of them. Furthermore, all the reasons mentioned up to now do not suffice to account for the existence of polygamy. They do not explain why in the past the old men wanted to keep all the women to themselves, or why a given individual becomes a polygamist. It is a fact that for more than one man none of these alleged reasons have been involved. It is also known that several natives have acquired fortunes by European work (as clerks, salesmen, traders, etc.) in order to be able to establish a harem, though there could have been no motive of vanity or gain in social influence. On the basis of my knowledge of circumstances, persons, and places, I am convinced that even for some natives living in their villages, the primary purpose was clearly sexual. I am acquainted with more than one such case.

768 584 In the past the widower and his family sometimes refused to pay, with the result that the parties took up arms. The right of war was involved. For when the hostilities ended, the culprit was required to indemnify all the families on his side for any member who was killed or wounded. Therefore he ran the risk of seeing all his property confiscated and being sold as a slave if they did not suffice. He found it was wiser simply to submit to normal sanctions rather than run such serious risks.

The situation with which we are dealing in this article may involve further complications if the woman has been living with her own family, or if she belongs to another man whose bride price has not yet been refunded. But it is preferable to deal with these complications in separate articles.

768 2. Before the bosóngo

If the woman dies before the bosóngo is paid, the widower is not required to pay an indemnity. However, he must complete the bride price by handing over "the slave." [450]

If he does not do so: (1) the alliance is broken ipso facto, and therefore he cannot bring the ibóleóko and does not receive a substitute; 2) the family of the deceased is entitled to one of the daughters if there are any, or to one of the boys if there are none. This is a compensation for the loss of the bosóngo.

Naturally, the woman's family can in practice refrain from claiming their rights. Thus, they may do so out of regard for their son-in-law who is influential, generous, and well disposed toward them, in anticipation of greater financial and social benefits. The similar remarks made throughout this study have already [157] familiarized us with the "broad-mindedness" of these peoples.

It might be observed that this situation is in no way different from the preceding one, since the woman's family is indemnified in either case. But, first of all, if the woman has left no children, the situation is not at all identical. Secondly, even if the financial aspect of the two situations is the same, the legal aspect is entirely different. The taking of a child and the refusal to accept the ibóleóko are not considered as compensation. The